

secret despatches that Philip penned in his secret cabinet, or carried in his pocket when he retired to his bedroom at night. In intrigue, combination, he was inexhaustible, indomitable. He modified his combinations to suit the situation, though he never swerved from his great aim. To say that he was unscrupulous is to say that he lived in an age in which* political morality was at a very low ebb indeed. Politicians in those days were professional plotters. From Madrid to Edinburgh they were engaged in hatching plot or counterplot in the struggle for supremacy or existence. Professions of honesty or friendship were mere veils of falsity or rascality. William did his share of this dirty diplomatic work, and yet managed to believe in Providence. He was the associate of so despicable a creature as Charles IX. against Philip, after, as well as before, the Massacre of St Bartholomew. He was forced to seek protectors wherever he could find them, and held out the conquest of the Netherlands as a bait for the self-interest of Charles or Elizabeth. For long the utmost he dared to hope for was that the Netherlands should be a dependency of France or England, or both, on terms which would at least guarantee it against a tyranny like that of Spain. Thus he plotted as well as prayed, and his justification lies in the fact that, without plotting, praying was, humanly speaking, useless. His enemies certainly did their share of both, and for a much poorer cause, and they had no right to reproach him with inconsistency or hypocrisy. They believed in Providence, and they did not scruple to offer rewards to assassins as well as torture and massacre thousands of innocent men, women, and children. William might stoop to devious courses, even in alliance with Providence, for the deliverance of an oppressed people. He did not pay miscreants to kill his enemies and deliver defenceless populations to massacre and outrage. He was as great an adept in dissimulation as the unscrupulous politicians with whom he had to fence. This might not be fair tactics from a high-minded standpoint—and the modern historian cannot always defend his integrity—but his opponents certainly had no reason, on grounds of personal probity, to complain of them.

To found a republic was not the aim of his policy of resistance to Alva. The republic did not, in fact, take shape